UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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TUESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Bosnian Government forces launch offensives against Bosnian Serbs in four areas; both sides release prisoners of war and civilian detainees in Sarajevo.

+ In a message on International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Secretary-General says tolerance is needed to assure security and social development.

+ Secretary-General to send envoy to Phnom Penh to discuss continuation of United Nations human rights presence in Cambodia.

+ United Nations launches inter-agency appeal for $183 million to fund humanitarian activities in Iraq.

+ UNHCR urges Turkey to show restraint in military activities in northern Iraq; voices concern for safety of 4,500 Kurdish refugees living in border areas.

+ Ministers from 121 countries issue Rome Statement on Forestry, seeking urgent implementation of UNCED decisions on management and conservation of world's forests.

+ Human Rights Committee begins fifty-third session by approving agenda and electing officers.

+ Assembly of International Seabed Authority concludes second part of first session in Kingston; fails to reach consensus on constitution of 36-member Council.

+ UNEP to host training programme on environmental law and policy in Nairobi from 27 March to 13 April.

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Bosnian Government forces yesterday launched four separate offensives against the Bosnian Serbs, according to a United Nations spokesman. There

For information media—not an official record

were engagements of various durations on the confrontation line north-west of Travnik, in the hills north of Tuzla, on high ground east of Tuzla, and in the Posavina corridor.

The spokesman said the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) regarded yesterday's military activities as "a body-blow to the cessation of hostilities agreement, but not necessarily a death-blow".

However, there was some encouraging news from Sarajevo, where the Bosnian Government and the Bosnian Serbs each exchanged 12 prisoners of war and two civilian detainees yesterday. The release of the civilian detainees followed an agreement last week between Special Representative Yasushi Akashi and Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic. The Bosnian Serbs also freed a Russian United Nations military observer who had been held for a few days, and were expected to free a detained interpreter tomorrow.

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Racial tolerance is fundamental to achieving the goals of the United Nations Charter, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a message on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, he said tolerance was vital to assuring international security, human rights, and social and economic development.

The Secretary-General noted that while great progress had been made -- apartheid had been eliminated and there was a greater awareness of the evil of discrimination -- much remained to be done. The United Nations offered a medium of communication between cultures, and a resource for Member States to study each other's strategies for accommodating diversity.

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The Secretary-General is to send an envoy to Cambodia to discuss the Cambodian Government's desire that the United Nations close its human rights office in Phnom Penh, according to a spokesman for the Organization. The Secretary-General discussed the matter with Second Prime Minister Samdech Hun Sen of Cambodia at a meeting yesterday, but did not agree to close the office.

In a statement issued today, the Cambodian Ministry of Information expressed appreciation for the work carried out by the United Nations office. It said the Government had only proposed a "non-resident role" for the office, and was willing to discuss the matter further.

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The United Nations today launched a consolidated inter-agency appeal for $183 million to fund humanitarian activities in Iraq. The appeal covers the period from 1 April 1995 through March 1996.

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The money will pay for 81 United Nations guards who continue to protect United Nations and non-governmental organization personnel in Iraq, and for a range of health, food-aid and education programmes.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today urged Turkey to show restraint in its military activities in northern Iraq. The UNHCR expressed deep concern for the safety of some 4,500 Kurdish refugees from Turkey living in areas close to the border between the two countries.

The UNHCR said it had received unconfirmed reports that at least two villages near the town of Zakho had been surrounded and subjected to house-to-house searches. Those reports spoke of hundreds of arrests.

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Forestry ministers from 121 countries have agreed on the "Rome Statement on Forestry", asking for urgent implementation of decisions taken at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992. After a two-day meeting hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in Rome, the ministers affirmed their determination to achieve the Rio de Janeiro Summit's objectives in the shortest time possible. UNCED called for the protection, sustainable management and conservation of the world's forests.

The Rome Statement on Forestry emphasizes the need to develop national plans which address economic and social causes of deforestation. It also emphasizes the need to continue to develop and apply criteria for the sustainable management of forests. The Statement stresses the importance of enhancing international cooperation, including mobilization of financial resources, for the benefit of developing countries. It further calls on the international community to rapidly advance the dialogue on trade in forest products and to assess the role of voluntary certification in promoting sustainable forest management.

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The Human Rights Committee yesterday began its fifty-third session by approving its agenda and electing its officers. Francisco José Aguilar Urbina, expert from Costa Rica, was elected Chairman, while Tamas Ban, of Hungary, and Omran El-Shafei, of Egypt, were elected Vice-Chairmen. Elections of a third Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur were deferred to a subsequent meeting.

Opening the meeting on behalf of the Secretary-General, Helga Klein of the Centre for Human Rights noted that the General Assembly had urged treaty bodies to monitor the enjoyment by women of their human rights. The Assembly had also urged those bodies to recommend that States parties submit gender-specific information. The Committee on the Rights of the Child had given particular attention to the rights of the girl-child, she said.

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The Assembly of the International Seabed Authority has concluded the second part of its first session in Kingston, Jamacia. In his report to the Assembly, President Hasjim Djalal (Indonesia) reiterated his formula for the allocation of seats in the Council -- the executive organ of the Authority -- taking into account the need for proportionality and the need to maintain a balance between developing and developed countries in that body.

The President's report stated that there had not been enough time to reach a consensus and constitute the 36-member Council. Informal consultations on how members would be nominated to the five different categories of membership in the Council had dominated the work of the three-week session, which began on 27 February. Since the Council was not formed, the Assembly was unable to continue with other tasks, including the election of a secretary-general of the Authority, the election of the 15-member Finance Committee, and the monitoring of the activities of the registered pioneer investors in deep seabed mining.

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The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will host a training programme on environmental law and policy at its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya, from 27 March to 13 April. The training programme is being organized in collaboration with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

The training programme will focus on strengthening capacity-building in areas concerning national legislation for environmental management, including implementation of global and regional conventions. It will also cover topics such as legal aspects of environment and trade, management of human settlements and land use, and industrial compliance and enforcement. Thirty-two individuals from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Central and Eastern Europe will participate.

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